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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5577
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RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000528

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ROKG ON BURMA TRIPARTITE CORE GROUP AND BURMA
POLICY

REF: STATE 27325

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The ROKG is not well informed about the Tripartite Core Group but is willing to raise the issue with Burmese authorities and in the UN. MOFAT believes ASEAN's quiet diplomacy is the key to influencing Burma. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In response to reftel points urging the ROKG to support continuation of the UN, ASEAN and Government of Burma Tripartite Core Group (TCG) for coordination of post-cyclone assistance, Director of the Foreign Ministry's (MOFAT) Southeast Asia Division Kim Young-chaе promised to raise the issue when the ROKG is next in contact with Burmese authorities. Noting that no ROK NGOs are currently active in the affected areas, he requested further information: how many aid workers would be affected by proposed restrictions on the TCG, and how much aid would be prevented from entering?

-- ROKG-Burma Contact

13. (C) On the ROKG's Burma policy more generally, Kim noted that, after having had little contact with the Burmese authorities over the last 10 years, the ROKG now planned to have yearly contact between the two foreign ministries. He had accompanied Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Yong-joon on his January 2009 visit to Burma (which the ROKG refers to as Myanmar), and that Burmese Deputy Foreign Minister Kyaw Thu had visited Seoul on March 30. During the January visit, the ROKG raised the possibility of development assistance to Burma, but such discussions were still quite preliminary, and the ROKG had conveyed that Burmese progress toward free elections would be needed. The March 30 meeting was more protocol than substance: preparation for the ASEAN leaders' summit that the ROKG will host in Cheju on June 1-2, which Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein will attend.

13. (C) Kim added that the ROKG believed it had a lot to offer Burma in terms of advice on transitioning from military to democratic rule and on economic development. However, bilateral discussions had not yet touched on these areas.

14. (C) Burmese authorities had cooperated quite well with the DFM Lee's January request for assistance with North Korean defectors in Burma, Kim said. The result was that no North Korean defectors were left in Burma. He did not have the most recent figures for defectors coming out of Burma, but said that about 300 North Koreans had come to the ROK from Burma over the last year.

-- ASEAN Influence

15. (C) Kim said that the ROKG Embassy in Rangoon was pessimistic about the potential for change in Burma, believing that only the military had the capacity to govern. As for ideas on how to influence Burma, Kim said that ASEAN's policy of non-interference meant that one could not expect public pressure for reform in Burma, but that ASEAN's quiet diplomacy and private discussions could bear fruit. He noted that during President Lee Myung-bak's March visit to Jakarta, Foreign Minister Wirajuda had been quite critical of Burma, comparing its Constitution to that under former Indonesian dictator Suharto. Since Indonesia was asserting itself in ASEAN, Kim reasoned, this could lead to pressure on Burma. Kim said that ASEAN diplomats claimed that Burmese officials showed some signs of increasing flexibility at the ASEAN summit in February.

16. (C) Kim expressed interest in the U.S. Burma policy, asking for updates when they are available.
STEPHENS